

The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 30 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

NOTE: In the statement, the President referred to President Vojislav Kostunica, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Statement on the Arrest of Former President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)

April 1, 2001

I welcome today's arrest of Slobodan Milosevic, the former President of Yugoslavia. His arrest represents an important step in bringing to a close the tragic era of his brutal dictatorship.

Milosevic was responsible for great suffering throughout the Balkan region. He deserves to be tried for his crimes against the Serbian people. He also deserves to be tried for violations of international law. We cannot and must not forget the chilling images of terrified women and children herded onto trains, emaciated prisoners interned behind barbed wire, and mass graves unearthed by U.N. investigators.

Milosevic's arrest should be a first step toward trying him for the crimes against humanity with which he is charged. I am confident that Yugoslavia will continue down the path of cooperation with the U.N. War Crimes Tribunal. I am encouraged by the actions that Belgrade has already taken to work with the Tribunal, including its assistance over the last several weeks in transferring two indictees to The Hague. I call on President Kostunica to continue this cooperation and to see that Milosevic is likewise brought to justice.

The United States appreciates the hard job that Yugoslavia faces in building its new democracy. I assure the Yugoslav Government and people that they can count on the friendship of the United States as they continue down the path of democratic and economic reform. We look forward to the day that Yugoslavia is fully part of a Europe that is whole and free and at peace.

Remarks on the United States Navy Aircraft Incident in the South China Sea

April 2, 2001

Late Saturday night in Washington, Sunday morning in China, a United States naval maritime patrol aircraft on a routine surveillance mission in international airspace over the South China Sea collided with one of two Chinese fighters that were shadowing our plane. Both our aircraft and a Chinese aircraft were damaged in the collision. Our aircraft made an emergency landing at an airfield on China's Hainan Island.

We have been in contact with the Chinese Government about this incident since Saturday night. From our own information, we know that the United States naval plane landed safely. Our Embassy in Beijing has been told by the Chinese Government that all 24 crewmembers are safe.

Our priorities are the prompt and safe return of the crew and the return of the aircraft without further damaging or tampering. The first step should be immediate access by our Embassy personnel to our crewmembers. I am troubled by the lack of a timely Chinese response to our request for this access. Our Embassy officials are on the ground and prepared to visit the crew and aircraft as soon as the Chinese Government allows them to do so, and I call on the Chinese Government to grant this access promptly.

Failure of the Chinese Government to react promptly to our request is inconsistent with standard diplomatic practice and with the expressed desire of both our countries for better relations.

Finally, we have offered to provide search and rescue assistance to help the Chinese Government locate its missing aircraft and pilot. Our military stands ready to help.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:38 a.m. on the South Grounds at the White House.